

The first issue of the *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* contains five papers in addition to the two pieces just described (a second, larger issue with 10 papers has just been published). RNJ readers will likely find the first of these, "Islands of Exile: Ideological Motivation in Maritime Migration," by Atholl Anderson, of particular interest. Anderson, of the Australian National University, is a leader in Polynesian archaeology and who will be familiar to many here, and "Islands of Exile" is a model synthesis of ethnographic, historical, and even literary sources – the sort of paper worth sharing with those who claim that scientists cannot write. Anderson's command of history and his ability to draw effectively on literary sources from Aldous Huxley to Jonathan Swift give his paper the gravity of something written in an earlier century when the world was smaller and it still seemed as if all human knowledge could be encompassed by a single scholar's mind. There is nothing stuffy or archaic about Anderson's writing though: his prose is lively, his arguments strong, and his ideas cutting edge. It is not difficult to see why the editors decided to lead off with his paper after their own introduction.

Anderson defines exile as "compelled movement away from a parent society by a minority of its members as individuals or as groups," and he poses the question as to whether exile can "help to explain variation in the archaeology of prehistoric East and South Polynesia." He begins by drawing on historical examples from Napoleon Bonaparte to Alexander Selkirk, whose self-imposed exile on one of the islands of Juan Fernández made him the model for Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, to massive penal colonies such as Devil's Island. He then considers "what pre-industrial islanders thought about their own origins," searching examples from both Icelandic sagas and Polynesian traditions for "assumptions about the colonizing impetus that sounded plausible to the traditional listener." It is especially interesting that Anderson compares Viking and Polynesian oral traditions here, rather than making the sort of tired analogies between the two cultures' navigational skills that we have seen dozens of times before. This sort of insightful and original approach pervades Anderson's paper, as it he repeatedly asks questions and draws answers that seem as if they should have been obvious a generation ago, but somehow weren't. Ultimately, he suggests that exile and colonization in Polynesian prehistory may have had religious motivations, and that religious architecture, in the case of Rapa Nui, or the lack thereof, as in New Zealand, may be the key to understanding the motivations behind some of these movements.

The other four papers, which include research on Okinawa, Mesopotamia, and South Africa, may be of less obvious interest to the RNJ reader, but the penultimate paper, "Obsidian Traffic in the Southeast Papuan Islands" by J. Peter White and several others, will reward the attention of the archaeologist, given the importance of obsidian to Rapa Nui prehistory and its study.

Although there are no papers specifically on Rapa Nui in this first issue, the island is mentioned repeatedly, for

instance in the introduction, where the editors refer to it in their discussion of "cultural responses to insularity, isolation, and circumscription," as an example of what Marshall Sahlins called "exotic efflorescence," in which "specialized knowledge by a group inhabiting a place with limited resources was channeled into a productive system" – i.e. monolithic architecture and statuary. They go on to make an analogy with comparable prehistoric industries on Malta. Not surprisingly, given the relevance of the Hotu Matu'a story to his thesis, Anderson also mentions Rapa Nui in his paper. Because so many factors make the prehistory of Rapa Nui central to the study of island archaeology – its extreme isolation, its spectacular archaeology, its unusual and undeciphered writing system – it is safe to expect that the island will appear frequently in the pages of the *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology*, and that it is unlikely an issue will go by without some discussion of Polynesian prehistory. RNJ readers with either a professional or avocational interest in archaeology will want to follow this journal as well.

Ultimately, the significance of this new journal's approach will not be lost on anyone who has understood the message of Paul Bahn and John Flenley's classic *Easter Island, Earth Island*. We all live on an island, and it is becoming smaller each day. The solutions that prehistoric peoples of the islands and coasts employed to address the problems of limited land and resources have relevance to us all. We welcome the *Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology* as a valuable forum for understanding these issues on a global scale.

### **RAPA NUI: GUARDIANES DE LA TRADICIÓN. MESTIZAJE Y CONFLICTO EN LA SOCIEDAD RAPANUI**

by María Eugenia Santa Coloma

302 pages with many b/w photos and illustrations,  
appendix, glossary, endnotes, bibliography. In Spanish.  
Soft cover, 15.5 x 15.5 cm

Rapanui Press, Museum Store, Museo Antropológico  
Padre Sebastián Englert, Hanga Roa, Rapa Nui, 2006

*Reviewed by Steven Roger Fischer*

"BOOKS WILL SPEAK PLAIN WHEN COUNSELLORS blanch," penned English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon nearly four centuries ago, a bold advocate of plain, honest, forthright writing. Yes, it has forever been a penchant of the wise and true. But alas, plain speaking has all too often been wanting in scholarship. When it appears – as here with María Eugenia Santa Coloma's popular version of her doctoral thesis – its gentle honesty not only delights ... it thrills.

For nearly a decade – that is, through the 1990s and into the early 2000s – Santa Coloma, former biologist turned social anthropologist, steadfastly pursued her University of Barcelona doctoral thesis investigating modern

Easter Island society, with laudable resolution and uncommon sensitivity for all things Rapanui. Once her doctoral thesis was completed, she commenced rewriting her results in popular fashion in order to share her insights with a much wider audience. Hence: *Rapa Nui: Guardianes de la Tradición*, just published on Rapa Nui by the Museum Store, an exceptionally handsome and rewarding volume.

Unusual for most non-resident scholars on Easter Island, Santa Coloma strove, during her many trips from Barcelona, to “cross the beach”. And she integrated well into local society, participating daily, delving ever deeper. She lived – and loved – Rapa Nui. This posture was rewarded almost immediately with insights which the fresh, receptive mind of the trained anthropologist then ably digested, analyzed, and later documented with admirable acuity. With this new publication, we can all share her excitement, travails, passion, and rare understanding.

The socio-anthropological study wears its scholar’s cap lightly. Some might contend it only builds atop Grant McCall’s many earlier seminal studies about the island. But my impression was rather that of a modern “upmarket neighbor” of McCall’s, whose windows not infrequently reflect unprecedented brilliances.

The book commences with anthropological basics, including the first Europeans in Pacific lives and the Polynesians’ evolving concepts and adaptations resulting from this encounter. Quoting impeccable sources, nevertheless Santa Coloma is fully aware of the Eurocentric bias and ethnocentric dangers to anthropologists while describing such cultures outside Western parameters of perception.

An extremely brief sketch of Rapa Nui social history follows, with some unfortunate lacunae. Santa Coloma misses entirely, for example, the whaling-era transformation of the island, at present one of the Pacific’s hottest topics. Her description of Easter Island’s *rongo rongo* script, I must confess, would fit nicely into a 1960s volume, not one from the 2000s. The *moai*? – they are hardly mentioned. And there is scant reference to the island’s petroglyphs or carvings or *ahu* or many other things one might expect. But then, these are not Santa Coloma’s bailiwick. She focuses on Rapanui society. And this she treats magnificently.

It is refreshing to read a book about Easter Island in which nearly all the facts, dates, and names are correct. Santa Coloma even announces Hotu Matu’a to be “legendary”, eschewing the near-universal error of citing this name as that of an historical personage in the Western sense.

What concerns Santa Coloma, above all, is the larger social picture of a Rapa Nui in constant flux, especially over the past half century or so. She asks all the right questions. Is it even possible for a small indigenous society to maintain an equilibrium between inherited traditions and “new horizons”, i.e. an adopted foreign culture? How does one *define* culture? Can one even speak about Polynesians from a Polynesian point of view when the observer is a Westerner? Santa Coloma dares to question herself as well ... and her “anthropological mission”, perhaps a chimera.

Still, she proceeds to excavate innumerable shards of insight, and this as well as any dirt archaeologist. “Rapa Nui’s case is that of a transitional society characterized by rapid changes in its mode of life, mainly variations in the impact on its children and in the possibilities available to parents to limit family sizes, accompanied by a ‘modern’ economy that stems from outside contacts” (pp. 44-5). Santa Coloma effectively compares Rapa Nui to other developing societies of the world, finding similar dynamics at work, as had been theorized by a variety of scholars. She calls Rapa Nui “*un magnífico laboratorio*” for the study of demographic changes (and of the absence of expected changes as well) and for the determination of the origins of demographic transition.

Her own personal story is never lost in the narrative. In fact, it wells up, like bubbles from a spring, every now and again. Her arrival at Santiago from Barcelona in 1994 reads like a Hollywood film: her luggage was lost (of course); then, the very next day, while in Valparaíso, she was robbed of all else – money, passport, faith. Once on Rapa Nui, however, her life’s nightmare at once metamorphosed into her life’s dream. Inés Chávez and family virtually adopted Santa Coloma as their own. Whereupon she boldly plunged into local life, here described colourfully and affectionately. Indeed, this is the part of the book that perhaps attracts the reader most strongly, especially for one who might have experienced something very similar on Easter Island. Here her Spanish prose is also its loveliest: touching, intimate, sensitive.

Soon Santa Coloma was setting to with diligence deciphering the early matrimonial records in the local registry. The records were chaos to the uninitiated, for a variety of reasons: social, linguistic, religious, ethnic. Much of her early work on the island was spent in the Registro Civil. Then she attacked the parish books (Santa Cruz). What a delight she experienced when she discovered invaluable late-19<sup>th</sup>-century parish records that had almost been torched by a cleaner’s son!

With similar diligence, she addressed the cycles of life on Easter Island – births and deaths, the constant population growth (since the 1870s a doubling every twenty years), the impact of an expanding population on the local economy and the resultant changes. One will read with astonishment, for example, that between 1951 and 1972 one Rapanui woman gave birth to 22 children! Indeed, it was just such enormous fertility that secured the Rapanui their survival, Santa Coloma affirms.

Things are much different today, of course. The island maintains almost exclusively small nuclear families, like those on the Chilean mainland. (Yet the larger Polynesian family grouping is still recognized here to a certain degree, albeit greatly weakened.) Changing dynamics on today’s Rapa Nui means more wealth, higher education, more and better jobs, more foreign intrusion. It also means more overseas experience for the Rapanui, with expanded horizons and expectations, indeed demands. Maternity is no longer a major goal for Rapanui women: education is, and a career,

greater economic prestige, more personal rights for women as equal partners and citizens.

Santa Coloma notes, for example, that still today, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, for proper medical attention the Rapanui will fly to Santiago or Pape'ete, if they can drum up the substantial funds. There is, even now, no trust in the local hospital.

Death plays a large role in Rapanui life. Indeed, almost constantly on this island where everyone is related to everyone else, at least once a fortnight, some relative will die. Whereupon, like *rigor mortis* itself, the death traditions set in. Accepting stoically, even calmly, life's last gift, the Rapanui hold communal rites. These are, again and again, reenacted with public pomp and demonstration—always dignified, respectful. Death is seen as the culmination of life and transition to another world: the hybrid heritage from ancient Polynesia and Catholicism. Santa Coloma describes all this with acute understanding and sympathy. Many more young Rapanui are now dying on the island, due to tragic road accidents, the result of an alarming increase in alcoholism and drunk-driving. More and more graves of the young now adorn the hauntingly beautiful cemetery near Tahai. Most Rapanui who live abroad wish, when they die, to be brought back to the island to lie there, too. But the cemetery is now wall-to-wall.

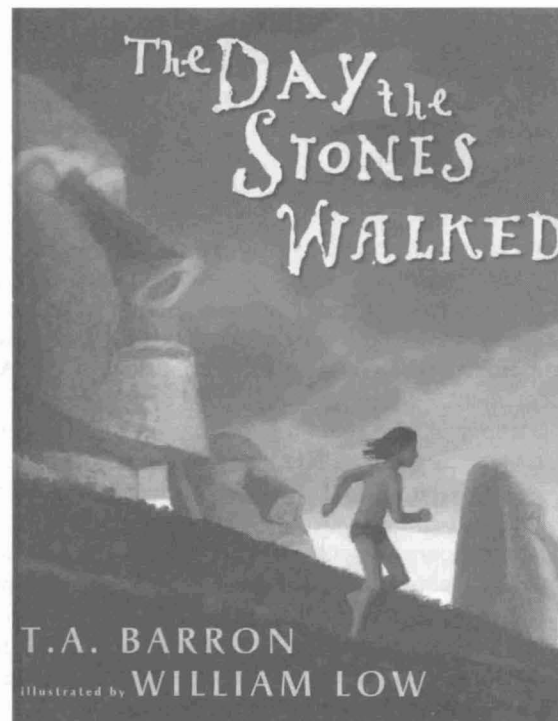
Emigration and immigration as well, their causes and effects, have caused enormous changes on Easter Island. Young Rapanui are now identifying more with Polynesia than with Chile; many declare their preference to study in Hawai'i or Tahiti. The Rapanui identity, despite growing numbers of mixed offspring, comprises also a surprising rejection of the "Chilean identity". However, the immediate financial benefits of a Chilean spouse are recognized by the Rapanui, who desire a strong connection to the mainland, as it is a base for better education and a career. Advancement in general is still to be had from the Chilean, not the Rapanui identity.

Language, above all, defines the current "us versus them" mentality on the island. However, fewer young Islanders speak Rapanui: today only 25% of those between 16 and 30 can communicate with one another in Rapanui. "Castellano"—the Spanish language—rules.

Santa Coloma addresses these and many more fascinating topics, with astute observation: deeply, insightfully, authoritatively, personally, realistically, and above all honestly. No, she is no epigone to Grant McCall; she is surely a trailblazer in her own right. Such a study as hers appears only once in a generation. Santa Coloma is to be congratulated ... and immediately translated into English for the larger international audience to read, enjoy, and profit from this splendid achievement.

*Rapa Nui: Guardianes de la Tradición* is the best of plain speaking. Francis Bacon would be proud.

(Steven Roger Fischer's latest book is *Island at the End of the World: The Turbulent History of Easter Island*, London: Reaktion Books 2005.)



### THE DAY THE STONES WALKED

by T.A. Barron; illustrations by William Low

Philomel Books

ISBN 978-0-399-24263-2

Hardcover, 30 pages

Review by Tom Christopher

FINALLY, SOMEONE HAS WRITTEN an Easter Island book for children that is just that. It's a little story about a boy, Pico, his father (a *moai* carver), and a tidal wave that brings the two together in an appreciation of their heritage. The illustrations by William Low are true to their subject matter and have the powerful feel one gets when viewing the *moai* in person. The story, although fictional, has that same feel, probably due to the author's genuine appreciation for the place, the people, and their marvelous works.

This book even passed the grandchildren test! It held the interest of a five and an eight year old who, up until now, have been reluctant to share their Grandfather's appreciation for all things Rapanui. For that, I thank T.A. Barron and the illustrator, William Low.

### RAPA NUI PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY OF WILLIAM HYDER

[www.flickr.com/photos/wdhyder/sets/72157594503101797/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/wdhyder/sets/72157594503101797/)

Review by Paul Horley

A NEW PHOTOGRAPHIC GALLERY devoted to Easter Island appeared on the Internet, featuring great photos taken by William D. Hyder in the framework of the Rock Art Recording project directed by Georgia Lee. Detailed information about this project can be found in her wonderful books: